



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Deval L. Patrick
GOVERNOR

Timothy P. Murray
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Ian A. Bowles
SECRETARY

Tel: (617) 626-1000
Fax: (617) 626-1181
<http://www.mass.gov/envir>

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Contact: Lisa Capone
(617) 626-1119
Robert Keough
(617) 626-1109

Veronica Varela
US Fish & Wildlife Service
(603) 223-2541

Massachusetts EEA and US Fish and Wildlife Service Announce

Housatonic River Restoration Projects

*Restoration Projects Funded with \$4 Million in
Damages Paid by General Electric for PCB Pollution*

BOSTON – The Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) today announced that several projects to restore and enhance the environment of the Housatonic River will soon be underway as a result of contracts recently signed or pending approval.

Totaling \$4 million, the projects range from controlling invasive species and surveying rare species along the river to acquiring conservation land, restoring river flows, and implementing a river-focused environmental literacy program. The work is designed to compensate for years of environmental degradation caused by releases of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the Housatonic River from General Electric's Pittsfield facility. PCB pollution affected aquatic organisms and habitats, as well as wildlife such as waterfowl and predators that consume contaminated organisms.

As part of an October 2000 consent decree, General Electric paid over \$15 million in natural resource damages (NRD). These NRD funds are managed by Natural Resources Trustees, which include the Massachusetts EEA, the State of Connecticut, the Department of the Interior's USFWS, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Roughly half of the total is available for restoration efforts in each of the affected states. Secretary Ian Bowles serves as the Commonwealth's trustee.

The Housatonic River traverses 69 miles of the Bay State, flowing north to south between the Taconic Mountain Range of eastern New York and the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts, then through Connecticut where it empties into Long Island Sound. The approximately 504-square-mile watershed provides habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna, including 117 rare plants and 33 rare animal species.

“This first round of projects stemming from the General Electric/Housatonic River Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration case will restore the river’s environment while improving the public’s access to and appreciation of this important waterway and the natural resources it supports,” Secretary Bowles said. “I am pleased to see these exciting projects get under way.”

"As an example, a three-year environmental education project recognizes the importance of connecting people with nature so they develop an appreciation for the natural world," said Marvin E. Moriarty, regional director for the Northeast Region of the USFWS. "MassAudubon and the Housatonic Valley Association will combine classroom sessions with hands-on field trips about the Housatonic River's natural resources. Each year, some 70 percent of Massachusetts fourth and sixth graders in the watershed will participate. This project sets the stage for stewardship of our natural resources in future generations."

From December 2005 to March 2006, EEA and USFWS (comprising the Massachusetts SubCouncil of the Housatonic River Natural Resource Trustees) solicited proposals and ideas from the public for various projects to restore or enhance natural resources of the Housatonic River watershed in the Commonwealth. After considering project evaluations and public comment, the Massachusetts SubCouncil voted in October, 2007 to fund 10 projects, which address four restoration priority categories: aquatic natural resources and habitat, terrestrial natural resources and habitat, recreational uses of natural resources, and environmental education and outreach.

Contracts have been signed to begin the following Round 1 Funding restoration projects:

- **Clapp Park to Wild Acres Greenway Project - \$250,000** (City of Pittsfield). This project will acquire two land parcels, totaling 31 acres along the river’s Southwest Branch to protect wildlife habitat and provide recreational opportunities.
- **Housatonic River Floodplain Forest Restoration Project - \$522,456** (Project Native). This project will restore and enhance floodplain forests along the Housatonic through native plantings and invasive species control, as well as land acquisitions and easements totaling approximately 130 acres.
- **Great Barrington Housatonic River Walk - \$133,308** (Great Barrington Land Conservancy). This project will reclaim an eroded section of riverbank in Great Barrington.
- **Enhanced Public Access to the Housatonic River - \$415,000** (ESS Group, Inc. and Housatonic Valley Association). This project will screen potential access sites and select five places as new access locations, followed by development of conceptual designs, permitting, and construction.
- **Housatonic Environmental Literacy Program (HELP) for the River - \$631,410** (Mass Audubon and the Housatonic Valley Association). This project aims to restore the relationship of the public to the Housatonic River and its watershed through education, active involvement, and river education experiences for students.

- **Berkshire Conservation Agent Program - \$235,079** (Berkshire Regional Planning Commission). This will provide municipal conservation commissions with technical assistance, including field work, application review, permit preparation, and monitoring and administration of projects according to Wetlands Protection Act permits.
- **Old Mill Trail - \$244,047** (Housatonic Valley Association). This project will provide river access through a passive recreational trail.

In addition, the following projects were approved for Round 1 funding, but are awaiting final contracts:

- **Rare Species Recovery on the Housatonic River - \$556,950** (Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program). This two-year survey will expand protection for rare species by identifying previously unknown species locations, generating conservation maps, and identifying sites for land acquisition and rare species restoration.
- **West Branch of the Housatonic Revitalization Project - \$750,000** (City of Pittsfield in partnership with the Massachusetts Riverways Program and Berkshire Regional Planning). This project involves removal of the Mill Street Dam to restore natural river flows.
- **Rising Pond Land Acquisition - \$261,750** (Berkshire Natural Resources Council). This project proposes to acquire and protect three parcels of land (161 acres) abutting the Housatonic River in Great Barrington, pending resolution of environmental issues.

"Our riverways should be healthy habitats for natural plant life and wildlife, and destinations for outdoor recreation and enjoyment. This funding addresses so many areas of environmental damage along the Housatonic River, and will allow future generations to enjoy the natural resources and beauty it provides," said Senator Benjamin B. Downing.

"The Housatonic River is a historic and natural asset that deserves to be both protected and restored. I am happy to see this federal and state partnership coming together to provide funding toward these goals," said Representative Denis E. Guyer.

"This is certainly exciting news. We have to make a commitment to this wonderful stretch of river here in the Berkshires. This cleanup is critical, not only to the economic development here but to the environmental enhancement and protection of this river," Representative Smitty Pignatelli said.

For future funding rounds, the Massachusetts SubCouncil is considering emphasis on projects that directly benefit aquatic and wildlife resources. Solicitation of Round 2 proposals is expected in 2008.

Details of Round 1 projects can be viewed at six public libraries within the Housatonic River watershed (Great Barrington Mason Library, Lee Public Library, Lenox Public Library, Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, Bushell-Sage Library in Sheffield and Stockbridge Library) and online at www.ma-housatonicrestoration.org.

These restoration achievements are made possible by cooperative efforts of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Programs of the EEA and the USFWS. Trustee representatives, who administer funds received from GE and work with local communities to

restore the Massachusetts portion of the Housatonic watershed, are EEA NRD Program Director Dale Young and USFWS NRD Specialist Veronica Varela.

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